

Oral History Transcription of Bonnie Duer on May 5, 2002.

PAT ~~S~~ALTER: I'll ask you your name and spell it out, ok?

BD: My name is Bonnie Duer my maiden name was Tate, Bonnie Tate.

PAT ~~S~~ALTER: So that was your family name, give your parents names and do you remember grandparents?

BD: My grandparents name was Reid on my mothers side and of course my grandparents on my dads side was Tate.

PAT ~~S~~ALTER: When did they come to Sebastopol?

BD: My mother and my two brothers and two sisters and myself came to Sebastopol in 1939. My mother bought an apple ranch on Blackney Rd. and we worked in the apples. I packed apples and picked apples and I worked in canneries. I went to school at Parkside at first, I was very small. Then I went to high school part time in Petaluma, my brother was there so I went there. I remember we're set up now here in the Vets Building and there used to be a packinghouse here. And that's where I packed apples.

Lots of good memories of Sebastopol. I met my husband George Duer, I was thirteen when I met him. Of course my heart would pitter patter when I would see him in his blue convertible. Of course I was too young to go with him, but he kept trying to get me to go in the convertible with him.

We sort of went our separate ways and then he went into the service and I didn't see him for a long long time. He had his family, got married, had his children and I got married and had my children. Then when things were right we got back together again and got married in Hawaii.

But getting back to my mother, she was a hard workingwoman. She worked at Mare Island during the war with so many women who help to build the ships for the boys for the boys fighting for this country. She would carpool from Sebastopol, get up a four in the morning and catch her bus, work all day and then come home. The kids worked in the apples to help keep the ranch going.

PAT ~~S~~ALTER: How many children in the family then?

BD: At that time there was one boy and three girls.

PAT ~~S~~ALTER: So all the girls were out there picking apples too all along?

That's right. Then we had to take them into town to the packinghouse and canneries.

I really admired my mother, she installed a lot in me. She made us very strong, realizing through working it's no shame to be hardworking person, to earn your money that way. I was telling one of the other ladies here, I must have been about 14 then and I went out onto Germone Rd. to get a job picking cherries, because I had to buy my school clothes. The man looked at me and said your too small to pick cherries, you can't handle the three ft. ladder. I said that's not fare to say that to me because I can do it. He says, ok there's the ladder and there's a bucket. So up the ladder I went, in a couple of days he came to me and said your one of the best cherry pickers we have. I was determined to show him that I could do it.

We had a good life in Sebastopol, so many times I wish it could be like it used to be.

PAT ~~S~~ALTER: What were some of your favorite memories that are different now?

BD: When they would have the apple show here in Sebastopol, it was really a big thing. Everybody knew each other and everybody was so friendly and very kind to each. You can still feel that feeling when you get together with the older folks, but that's something that's missing from our society. We are all too busy to be friendly.

PAT ~~S~~ALTER: How about the Duer side of the family?

BD: George and I have been married 17 years now. He has a lovely sister named Adabelle that I'm very fond of. We are like sisters, we bonded really well. Duer Road is named after George's family. His dad was a well driller. He drilled the well for Luther Burbank out by the cemetery in Sebastopol. His dad wanted to go another foot deeper for clean water, but Luther said "no, I won't pay for another foot".

BD: George's family has a lot of history here in Sebastopol.

PAT ~~S~~ALTER: Do you get together with the Duer family?

BD: Oh yes, we talk and share pictures. There are a lot of streets named after George's mother the Huntley Theatre. They had the first theatre; I believe it was the first, Mr. Huntley did. I was trying to think of the name, I think it was Starlight Theater. And it was down close to where Carlson's store used to be.

George and Adabelle Duer graduated from Analy High School. I didn't graduate from Analy. I went part time to Petaluma High School, I was working in the eggs down there, candling eggs. So I would work part of the day, then go to school then go back and work some more. The only thing I regret that I didn't graduate from high school and getting a better education. Opportunity is a lot more plentiful now then back in 1939. It wasn't easy for people that move and sold their home in a different state and came to another one.

PAT SALTER: Did you say when your parents came to Sebastopol?

BD: In 1939, because my mother had found this piece of property she liked. Would you believe she paid only \$1900 for this house and piece of property?

And Dr. Beaman was a very good friend of my mothers. He lived in Camp Meeker, but his office was in Sebastopol. He told her about this piece of property and took her out to see it. And that was when she decided she wanted to stay here. She was from Mississippi.

PAT SALTER: Had she corresponded with him before she came?

BD: No, we came to Ukiah because she had a friend there. She had a place there and wanted my mother to live there. She had looked at a piece of property in Ukiah and it had English Walnuts on it and she said that wouldn't do for her.

So we came to Sebastopol and the doctor took her out to the property on Blackney and she said yes that's the one she wanted. It's on the same side as Germone Rd.

In Sebastopol the fire horns started blowing and there was quite a commotion when the war ended. And we all came running out and ran down onto Main Street and everybody started hugging each other. Everybody was so happy that the war was over, and that our boys would be coming home. I think it's sad that the soldiers didn't get the recognition that they deserved.

PAT SALTER: Do you have any favorite memories from school that stand out in your mind?

BD: I remember we used to have to walk from Blackney Rd., that was about three miles to see a show. But a lot of kids did it. We would be sure and leave before it got dark. Some of the boys that lived next door to us, at the show, knew we were there and they went and hid up at the cemetery. We would always walk faster there because we would be scared of ghosts you know. When they hid and jumped out my sister and I, I'm telling you we ran all the way from the cemetery to Blackney Rd.

PAT SALTER: Was there a school bus that came out to pick you up?

BD: There was the Pleasant Hill School that was close to us.

There were a lot of older women that I would work for in town. I would go get their groceries; I would help them get their wood inside. Mrs. Espy would always go to church; she would come by and take me to Sunday School. My mother would come later and go to church later.

In Mississippi I remember it was cold and we had a drought the year before. The cows couldn't give milk because they hadn't eaten grass or food. They couldn't raise anything. My mother wrote to President Roosevelt and she told him that her children needed coats and that it was cold. And here come a box from the white house and the mailman said someone here must be real important. She had the knowledge to sit down and write them. But we all had warm wool coats that winter. My teacher said, "oh Bonnie, that makes me cry".

BD: Were those hard conditions the reason she decided to move to California and how old were you at that time?

PAT ~~SA~~LTER: Yes, I was thirteen when we moved to Sebastopol. When we left we first went to Texas, I had a brother who lived there. My mother was a single parent and she worked hard to raise us by herself. Plus she had a disabled child. I look back on it and I don't know how she did it, because I see all the help single parents have now. Back then they didn't have anything.

But my mother was a wonderful woman, for such a small person how strong she was.

This interview was done by Pat Salter.

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